



Iowa Community
ACTION
ASSOCIATION



Iowa Utilities Board: Phasing in Disconnection of Utility Services

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Agenda

- **Background (Winter Moratorium Extension)**
- **DOCKET NO. SPU-2020-0003**
- **Municipal Utilities**
- **Reasonableness Standard**
- **Investor-Owned Utilities**
- **Household Responsibilities**
- **Activity, Resources, Questions, & Success Stories**

Background

- **March 13, 2020:** IUB issued order **extending winter moratorium** for eligible customers from April 1 to **May 1**
- **March 27, 2020:** IUB issued order **prohibiting disconnection of electric or gas during public health emergency** (determined by the Gov.)
- **April 27, 2020:** Governor extended declaration **prohibiting disconnection of utility services until May 28, 2020**
- **May 28, 2020:** electric/gas services provided by a **municipally owned utility or electric cooperative** may **resume disconnections**
 - Subject to certain requirements
- **July 1, 2020:** **investor-owned utilities** may **resume disconnection**
 - Subject to certain requirements

DOCKET NO. SPU-2020-0003

Outlines **conditions and requirements for utility disconnections** post COVID-19 Public Health Emergency declaration

Municipals/Cooperatives: Disconnection Requirements

Disconnections can begin May 28, 2020

- After **customer has not paid bill within the 20 days** allowed, utility sent **12-day notice**
 - **7-day & 48-hour** notices required if initial notice was sent before **May 21st**
- Currently, only a **12-day notice is required prior to disconnection**
 - Utility must also **try to reach household by phone or in person**

M/C: Disconnection Requirements (cont.)

- Utility shall **postpone disconnection for 30 days** if disconnection presents **serious danger to health of residents**
 - Encouraged to accept **verbal statements**
 - Normal health conditions apply plus testing positive for COVID-19
 - Extensions shall be provided if resident is under COVID-19 quarantine at end of original 30 days
- **Payment Agreements** shall be offered & must be **at least 12 months**
 - Following **reasonableness standard**

Reasonableness Standard

199 IAC 19.4(11)(b)

Whether a payment agreement is reasonable will be determined by **considering the current household income, ability to pay, payment history including prior defaults on similar agreements, the size of the bill, the amount of time and the reasons why the bill has been outstanding, and any special circumstances creating extreme hardships within the household.** The utility may require the person to confirm financial difficulty with an acknowledgment from the department of human services or another agency.

MidAmerican Customer Support Plan

Disconnections will begin July 24, 2020

- Held to the **same requirements as Municipals/Cooperatives**
- Engaging in **customer education/outreach** to avoid disconnections
- Not collecting security deposits | Waiving late fees & reconnection fees
- **Phasing in** collections/disconnections—21 billing groups
- **Starting over/recalculating repayment plans** starting June 1st
- **Tentative: possible payment** for customers who cannot pay & demonstrate financial impacts related to the COVID-19 pandemic
 - Clients will be required to provide information & supporting documentation

Alliant Customer Support Plan

Disconnections began July 1, 2020

- Held to the **same requirements as Municipals/Cooperatives**
- Engaging in **customer education/outreach** to avoid disconnections
- Waiving late fees & reconnection fees until July 31, 2020
- **Returning more than 80% of customer deposits to some qualified customers**
- Not forgiving past due amounts at this time
- Options for **new, renegotiated, or extended payment agreements**
 - Including **12-day disconnection notice** rather than 1 day if customer fails to comply with payment agreement
 - **3rd flex payment** agreement possible

Black Hills Customer Support Plan

Disconnections will begin August 24, 2020

- Held to the **same requirements as Municipals/Cooperatives**
- Engaging in **customer education/outreach** to avoid disconnections
- **Relaxed budget billing enrollment rules** to allow delinquent customers to enroll in budget billing
- Waiving late fees & considering waiving reconnection fees
- **Phasing in disconnection** based on highest past due accounts first

**Please Note: Updates to Plans are
expected for the foreseeable future.**

Household Responsibilities

- **Contact the utility** as soon as they know they cannot pay the amount owed
- **Contact local Community Action** for assistance options
- Request a **reasonable payment plan**
 - **Customers have 10 days after entering a payment plan to renegotiate if needed**
- When a **medical concern** is present: contact doctor or a public health official and ask them to provide a notification that shutting off your utility service would pose a health danger for a person living at your residence
 - **Investor-Owned Utilities: COVID-19 test results not required for first requested delay of disconnection; all require paperwork for second request**
- **If bill is incorrect, dispute it** (still must pay part that is correct) by contacting utility agency (Utility will not shut off for 45 days while the dispute is worked out)

Activity: Let's Play Jeopardy!

Disconnection Requirements	Investor-Owned Utilities	Household Responsibilities
<u>\$200</u>	<u>\$200</u>	<u>\$200</u>
<u>\$400</u>	<u>\$400</u>	<u>\$400</u>
<u>\$600</u>	<u>\$600</u>	<u>\$600</u>
<u>\$800</u>	<u>\$800</u>	<u>\$800</u>

Due to COVID-19, the winter moratorium was extended until this day in 2020 for municipally owned and electric cooperatives.

ANSWER

What is
May 28th



Due to COVID-19, the winter moratorium was extended until this day in 2020 for investor-owned utilities.

ANSWER

What is
July 1st



**The minimum amount of
time for a Payment
Agreement.**

ANSWER

What is

12 Months



The amount of time prior to disconnection a notice must be sent to households.

ANSWER

What is

12 Days



The investor-owned utility that may begin an assistance program where customers can receive a payment to go toward their energy bill.

ANSWER

What is

Mid-American



The investor-owned utility that is returning 80% of some customer deposits to assist with energy bills.

ANSWER

What is **Alliant**



**When Mid-American will
begin disconnections.**

ANSWER

What is
July 24th



**The number of days Alliant
has agreed to wait to
disconnect service if a
Payment Agreement
payment is missed.**

ANSWER

What is
12 days
(typically just 1 day)



**The organization households
should contact for
energy assistance.**

ANSWER

What is

Their local Community Action Agency



**When utilities will ask
for proof of a positive
COVID-19 test.**

ANSWER

What is

**The second time a
household requests a delay
is disconnection due to
COVID-19**

(first time, verbal statement is accepted)



The amount of time the utility will not shut off service if there is a dispute over the amount owed.

ANSWER

What is
45 Days



The name of the code households (or CAAs) can use to advocate for lower or lengthier repayment plans.

ANSWER

What is

The Reasonableness Standard

199 IAC 19.4(11)(b)



Resources

[Order Phasing in Disconnection of Utility Service](#)

[MidAmerican Customer Support Plan](#)

[MidAmerican Regulatory Accounting Proposal](#)

[Alliant Customer Support Plan](#)

[Alliant Regulatory Accounting Proposal](#)

[Black Hills Customer Support Plan](#) | [Supplemental](#)

[Black Hills Regulatory Accounting Proposal](#)

[Utility Shut Offs-Iowa Legal Aid](#)

[IUB Customer Rights and Responsibilities](#)

[IUB SPU-2020-0003 Frequently Asked Questions](#)

Disconnection education materials from ICAA coming soon!

What can I do if I receive a disconnection notice from my utility provider because of a past-due bill?

- 1 If you are able, pay the bill in full.
- 2 Contact your local Community Action Agency for assistance.
- 3 Enter a reasonable payment plan with the utility.
- 4 Provide the utility a written statement from a doctor or health official stating danger for a person living in the residence.
- 5 Tell the utility if you think part of the amount shown on the bill is wrong.

Frequently asked questions

How will I be told the utility is going to shut off my service?

You must be given a written notice at least 12 days before the service is shut off. The utility must also try to reach you by phone or in person before shut-off. From November 1 – April 1, the utility must put a written note on your door to tell you service will be shut off.

If you have not made payments required by an agreed-upon payment plan, your service may be disconnected with only one day's notice.

If my service is shut off, when will it be turned back on?

The utility will turn service back on if you pay the whole amount you owe or agree to a reasonable payment plan. If you make the payment during regular business hours, the utility must make a reasonable effort to turn service back on that day. Otherwise, they must do it by 11 a.m. the next day.

The utility may charge you a higher fee to turn your service back on outside of normal business hours. Tell them to do it during normal business hours for the least cost.

When can the utility shut off service?

Your utility may shut off your service between the hours of 6 a.m. and 2 p.m., Monday through Friday.

The utility may not shut off your service:

- On nights, weekends, or holidays;
- If you enter into a reasonable payment plan to pay the overdue amount;
- If the temperature is forecasted to be 20°F or colder during the following 24-hour period;
- From November 1 – April 1 if you have applied for energy assistance;
- If you have notified the utility that you dispute a portion of your bill and you pay the part of the bill that you agree is correct;
- During deployment or within 90 days after the end of deployment if one of the heads of household is a service member deployed for military service. The utility must be informed of the deployment prior to disconnection.

For further assistance



Regulations - bit.ly/UtilityRights
Iowa Legal Aid - (800) 532-1275
Iowa Utilities Board - (877) 565-4450
I.U.B. Consumer Advocacy - customer@iub.iowa.gov



Utility shutoffs: Your consumer rights

Get help paying your power bills.

Contact your Community Action at bit.ly/FindYourAgency.

To avoid disconnection, you must apply for energy assistance before your service is shut off. Otherwise, your service will not be reconnected. Notify your utility that you may be eligible and have applied for energy assistance.

If you're eligible for energy assistance, your service won't be disconnected November 1 – April 1.

Enter a payment plan.

Contact your utility as soon as you know you can't pay the amount owed.

If you can't pay all the money at one time, the utility must offer you a payment plan that spreads payments evenly over a period of at least 12 months. The plan may be longer depending on your financial situation.

The Reasonableness Standard

Whether a payment agreement is reasonable must be determined by considering current household income, ability to pay, payment history, size of bill, reasons that the bill has been outstanding, and circumstances creating extreme hardship within the household.

Utilities are required to adhere to this standard in payment plans, according to Iowa Administrative Code 199.20.4. Use it to your advantage!

If you owe money from a previous payment plan with the utility, you may qualify for a second or even third plan.

If you don't make the payments you promise, your utility may shut off your utility service on one day's notice. To avoid this, either make the remaining payments or enter into another payment agreement.

Get a doctor's note.

Get a doctor's note from your doctor or a public health official stating that shutting off your service would pose a health danger for a person living at your residence. Community Action can help you with this.

The statement must be submitted to the utility no later than 5 days after they were notified of the health condition.

If the utility receives this statement, your service will not be shut off for 30 days. This delay is to allow time to arrange payment of your bill or find other living arrangements. After 30 days, your service may be shut off.

Dispute the bill's cost.

Contact the utility and tell them that you are disputing the bill. You must pay part of the bill you think is correct.

If you do this, the utility may not shut off your service for at least 45 days after the date the bill was mailed, while you and the utility work out the dispute over the part of the bill you believe to be incorrect.

QUESTIONS?

SUCCESS STORIES?